Executive Summary

Columbia Heights/Mount Pleasant Transportation Study

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This study, led by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), is intended to identify a series of short- and long-term improvements that will enhance the operation and condition of the transportation system in the Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are undergoing a significant amount of change, with a number of large-scale commercial, retail, and residential developments underway.

The evaluation of potential improvements is based on the following key objectives developed during the study:

- Promote safe and convenient mobility for all forms of transportation – pedestrian/bicycle/vehicular/transit;
- Provide a framework for addressing future transportation needs through transit-oriented development principles;
- Provide a forum for community input on future transportation system elements;
- Develop creative approach to right-size parking for urban residential, commercial, and employment needs; and
- Improve aesthetic of neighborhood streets.

ES.1 Columbia Heights/Mount Pleasant Multimodal Transportation System

Travel characteristics in the neighborhood support the need to focus on all forms of transportation, particularly transit and pedestrian travel. Available data indicates that alternative forms of transportation play a key role in the study area's transportation system. Overall, 44 percent of residents in the study area use transit to commute to work. Just 26 percent of area residents drive alone to work, in comparison to the District average of 38 percent.

Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant are challenged by the large numbers of automobile commuters that travel through the neighborhoods. The challenge is to accommodate these commuters while addressing neighborhood concerns regarding high speeds,

pedestrian safety, and heavy traffic volumes. At present, most of the study area intersections are operating at a level of service (LOS) of "D" or better during both morning and evening peak periods and on weekends. However, a number of individual approaches to intersections are operating at LOS of "E" or "F." Delays are more consistent on the eastbound and westbound approaches to intersections. In many cases, delays at these intersections can be addressed by retiming signals to better accommodate traffic. However, some intersection changes are also necessary.

In addition to Metrorail, the study area is served by a network of 19 Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) bus routes. High levels of service are provided with headways as short as four minutes during peak hours of travel on some routes. Bus service continues to play a critical role in the neighborhood transportation system and a number of bus stop locations warrant a shelter based on boarding data. In some instances, individual bus stops with observed boarding volumes in excess of 400 passengers per day do not have a shelter provided.

Pedestrian safety is a particularly critical issue given the high level of pedestrian activity. Unfortunately, high volumes of traffic, particularly during peak hours, have created pedestrian safety issues at a number of locations. Much of the new development planned in the heart of Columbia Heights is expected to attract patrons that walk or take transit. If these new developments are successful in encouraging transit and pedestrian travel, the pedestrian environment must be comfortable and safe. In addition, most riders at this Metrorail Station are arriving on foot (85 percent of all passengers walk to the Station).

The lack of connectivity through out the neighborhood and additional bike lane coverage are concerns for bicyclists in the area. The 14th Street bike lane that ends two blocks short of the Metrorail Station and is an example of this problem.

Parking is also a critical issue. No off-street parking is available to the general public within one-quarter mile of the Columbia Heights Metrorail Station. A number of parking regulation signs are faded, present confusing messages, and appear to be indicative of poor maintenance. Improving the appearance and clarity of the signs' messages would help avoid motorist confusion and unnecessary tickets. New retail development is likely to increase the demand for neighborhood parking.

ES.2 Recommended Transportation Improvements

This report contains more than 30 specific recommendations for improvements. Many of these recommendations focus on low-cost, high-impact recommendations that will address specific transportation issues identified. A number of these recommendations seek to rebalance the transportation system with an increased emphasis on transit, pedestrian, and bicycle travel. Although recommendations are grouped by various modes of transportation, many will provide benefit to more than one form of travel. In particular, a number of the traffic recommendations are intended to address pedestrian safety issues identified at specific intersections. The recommendations contained in this report will

help support increased travel that will come with planned new development in the neighborhood.

Traffic – Recommendations address isolated areas of congestion as well as pedestrian safety issues created by excessive signal timing lengths. In addition, some geometric changes are recommended to promote pedestrian safety and accommodate increased traffic expected with several large-scale developments along 14th Street.

Transit – The Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods are provided with a wealth of transit services with Metrorail and numerous WMATA bus routes. Transit recommendations fine-tune the existing transit system with an emphasis on improving bus-related infrastructure, recognizing the significance of bus travel within the neighborhood.

Pedestrian – The study area has developed as a high-density neighborhood that allows residents to access services and jobs on foot. Recommendations contained within this section seek to address safety issues and enhance the overall pedestrian environment within the neighborhood. Addressing these issues will facilitate pedestrian travel and reduce the level of auto travel among area residents.

Bicycle – The District has recently begun to promote bicycle travel aggressively with the designation of bike lanes, bicycle parking, and other supporting facilities. Bicycle travel will play a large role in discouraging automobile travel to the new retail developments along 14th Street. Recommendations seek to expand the coverage of bicycle lanes within the study area.

Parking – The Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods struggle with a limited supply of on- and off-street parking. Recommendations address issues of enforcement, regulations, and potential shared parking strategies to ensure that the neighborhood will not be adversely affected by increased demand for parking that will likely follow increased retail development. Maintaining a high share of non-auto trips to the developments is critical to insure that parking supplies are adequate. Shared parking strategies may offer some relief to the neighborhood on Sundays when excessive on-street parking blocks travel lanes and contributes to increased traffic congestion.